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# IDENTITIES FROM AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE. THE SOUTH OF THE IBERIAN PENINSULA AS AN OBJECT OF STUDY FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF CULTURAL MATERIAL (5<sup>TH</sup>-7<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES AD)

**Abstract:** The work that is presented is focused on the study of identities from an archaeological perspective, and specifically with the material culture found in funerary contexts of the southern peninsula in the transition from the classical to the medieval world (5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD). The population groups that inhabited the south of the Iberian Peninsula during the chronology under study had a strong Hispano-Roman substrate, and evidence of cultural and economic interaction with other groups is appreciated. However, sometimes the chronological and cultural ascriptions were made from this type of objects, without taking into account other elements that would help to understand these population groups.

**Keywords:** *Iberian Peninsula, necropolis, material culture*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the European continent countless necropolises have been excavated belonging to the chronological timeframe that we focus upon with this occasion. The graves have been excavated and the objects that accompanied the buried people have been found, the grave goods, both ritual and clothing. “Dress accessories, jewellery, weapons and other objects, furnished burial practice, with considerable geographic and chronological variation in style”<sup>1</sup>.

The funerary register can provide very useful information to understand a social and cultural structure, as well as economic realities. Funerary rites and practices are one of the best ways to approach their ideology, culture, and religiosity<sup>2</sup>.

Identity is one of the issues that has been discussed in post-roman studies. To understand these “markers”, or elements of identity, it is necessary to look at them in their archaeological context, trying to understand for whom

<sup>1</sup> KLEVNĀS *et alii* 2021.

<sup>2</sup> VICENT 1995; LULL/PICAZO 1989; PINAR/TURELL 2007; FERNÁNDEZ CRESPO/TEJEDOR RODRIGUEZ 2011; SALINERO SÁNCHEZ 2020a.

they were made<sup>3</sup>. From the funeral record we can delve into identity, the traits that define an individual or a group and their own characteristics.

In this sense, the choice of this geographical area is due to the fact that between the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD and the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD it was a border area that at some point belonged to what was once the Justinian province of Spania. This fact led, as we shall see below, to the cultural ascription of some sites, due to the material culture found in the funerary remains. contexts, specifically when most of the archaeological interventions took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s. past. Some necropolises in the province of Granada, specifically, Las Delicias and El Almendral (Ventas de Zafarraya), were assigned to military contingents of the Eastern Roman Empire, due to the “presence” of *castra* and *castella* type buildings, to the troops installed in the south of the peninsula, and the presence of some of the grave goods that classified them as belonging to Byzantine military garrisons<sup>4</sup>. According to this theory, other necropolises that would fall within this group are those of the province of Malaga, specifically: El Tesorillo (Teba),

are of the opinion expressed by Román and Martín that they also do not observe clear arguments for such an association<sup>6</sup>, although it is true that the presence of troops in the region was evident, as has been witnessed thanks to written sources<sup>7</sup>.

The aim of this work is to “demystify” some aspects that are in force in terms of these ascriptions and provide new contributions on the “identities” of these people who inhabited the south of the Iberian Peninsula during the transition between the classical to the medieval world, from the perspective of the material culture found in funerary contexts.

## 2. THE GRAVE GOODS

Next, the study of the trousseau will be carried out, trousseau associated with the ritual will be presented, such as the ceramic elements and those called personal, that were found inside the graves. The personal and / or clothing objects are the most “striking” objects because they are the ones that have traditionally been used for dating some of the sets. (Fig. 1)

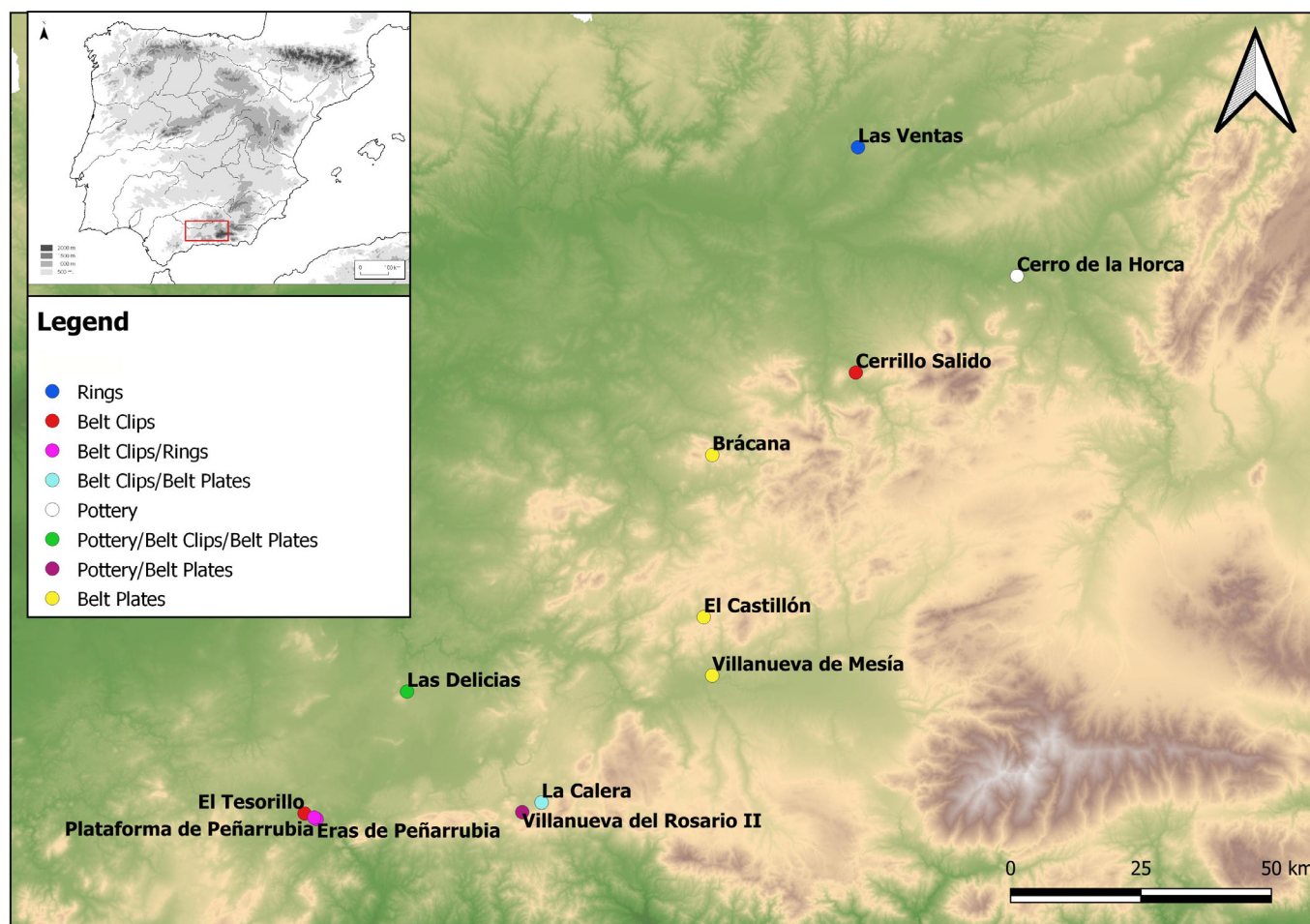


Fig. 1. Map with location of the sites. Own elaboration based on QGIS.

La Calera (Villanueva del Rosario), Villanueva del Rosario II, and one of those excavated so far in the surroundings of Peñarrubia, Eras de Peñarrubia (Campillos)<sup>5</sup>. However, we

<sup>3</sup> MARTINEZ/SASTRE/TEJERIZO 2018, 247.

<sup>4</sup> SALVADOR 1988, 345; SALVADOR 1990, 175.

<sup>5</sup> RAMOS 2003, 21.

<sup>6</sup> ROMAN/MARTÍN 2014, 67.

<sup>7</sup> VALLEJO 2012.

### 1.1 Pottery

It is common to find this type of elements inside the graves, being mainly the finding of the characteristic funerary jars. However, there are also other typologies such as small bowls of Roman tradition, such as in Las Delicias (Granada) or Villanueva del Rosario II (Málaga), *sigillatas*, and common ceramics, in the Cerro de la Horca (Jaén)<sup>8</sup>. Their content today is not entirely clear, since this type of studies are not numerous, and those few are known to defend that they could contain oil or water<sup>9</sup>. The liturgical meaning is the most feasible hypothesis.

Sometimes we find several ceramic jars with these characteristics within the same tomb. This element would be related to the reuse of the grave for several burials, as more than one individual is usually found buried. (Fig2).

Different types of ceramic jugs can be found on the same site. It can be said that these vessels were made on a potter's wheel, with a circular rim and light-coloured pastes. The associated chronology for these ceramics is the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries and we can see that there is no drastic distinction in terms of their typologies, there are only small variations depending on the region where they are found<sup>10</sup>.

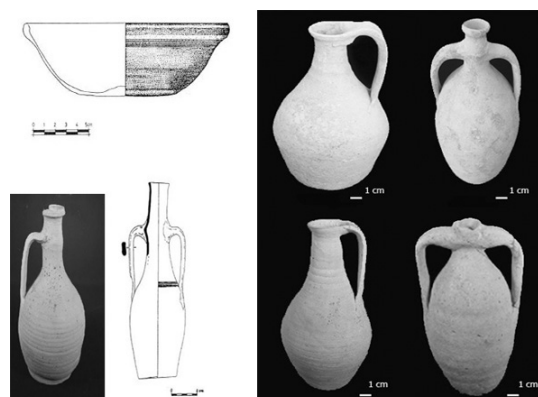


Fig. 2. Examples of the pottery. TORO/RAMOS 1987; SERRANO/ALIJO 1989; SALINERO-SÁNCHEZ 2019;2021.

### 1.2 Belt clips

In relation to belt brooches, the first to be referred to are those found in the northern part of the province of Malaga, specifically in the area of the Guadalteba reservoir, where there are three necropolises chronologically assigned to the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.

To begin with, we must include three brooches found in the necropolises of El Tesorillo, Eras de Peñarrubia and Plataforma de Peñarrubia, due to their chronotypological characteristics.

In their typological analysis, they are brooches whose terminal part is topped by an apex, a rectangular buckle, included in the body of the piece. The decoration that it presents in the terminal part is circular, having semicircular incisions framing a cross. Traditionally, this type of belt clasp has been assigned to a subtype or transitory type within the classification of lyriform plates dated between the second

half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century and the first dawn of the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, corresponding to the transition of levels from the IV-V for Ripoll<sup>11</sup>. This type of brooch is quite common in the Baetic region, and also shows Byzantine influences, which may lead us to deduce that they are the result of commercial exchanges or of the prevailing fashions in the peninsular territory at this time, or even the result of local production derived from this second factor.

In the same area, specifically in the El Tesorillo necropolis, in other graves that make up this necropolis, they found a lyriform-type<sup>12</sup> brooch and another cruciform made of bronze and a kidney-shaped buckle with a recess in the upper central part<sup>13</sup>.

In another necropolis, in La Calera (Málaga), inside two graves, they found two belt clips, with incised decoration. The decorative motifs they present are very similar to the decorative belt plates, which will be discussed later. In a recent work we have found parallels with late Roman examples, such as that of Totanés in the province of Toledo, or even in territories outside the peninsular territory such as in Gaul in the Merovingian graves of Saint-Denis in a context of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. They found brooches that bear similarities to those of the Malaga contexts. Therefore, its chronological horizon would be between the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century AD, fitting with the other materials found in the necropolis<sup>14</sup>.

Another example that must be mentioned is that of the Cerrillo Salido necropolis in Jaén. This finding had some relevance in the investigation, since it was an openwork belt clasp, with a kidney buckle and articulated by a hinge. The decorative motif of the plate was based on three circular vegetable scrolls that close each one of them, a bird with a long neck and a downward-facing beak. Palol and Ripoll assigned it to the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD due to the articulation of the plate and buckle, since it is quite frequent in Hispanic pieces of that time. Likewise, they point to the Byzantine-Mediterranean influence on Hispano-Visigoth trousseau in the Hispano-Roman population<sup>15</sup>. (Fig3)

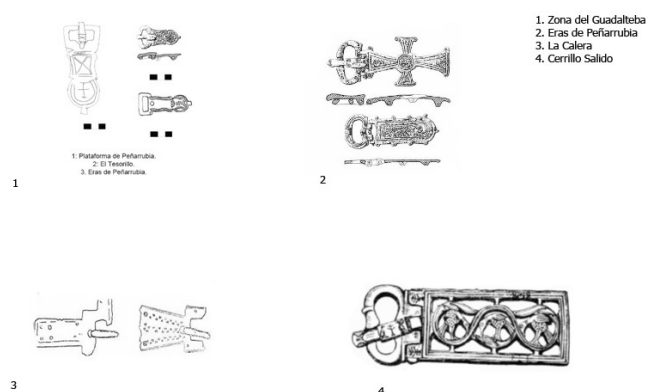


Fig. 3. Examples of the belts clips. PALOL 1955; SERRANO/ATIENZA/LUQUE 1985; RIPOLL 1988; GUTIÉRREZ/LARA 1990.

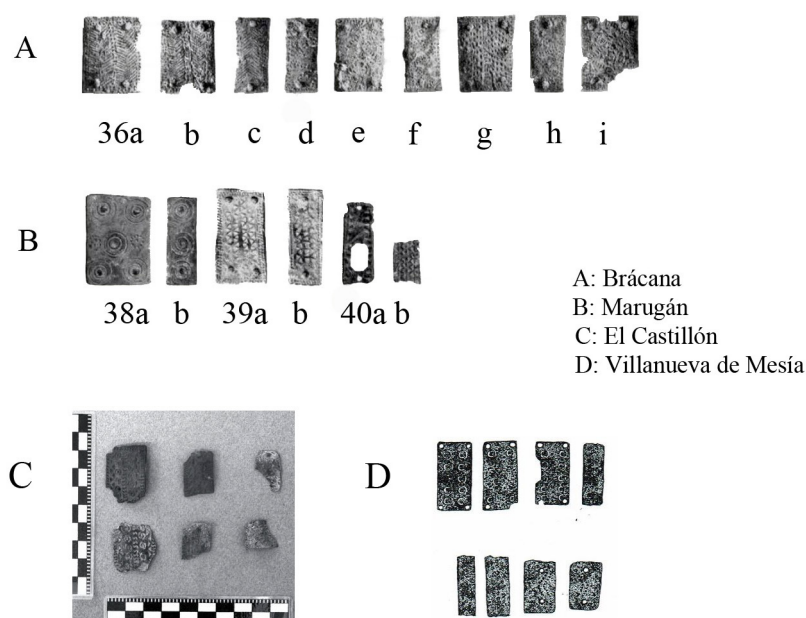
<sup>8</sup> FERNÁNDEZ CHICARRO 1954; FERNÁNDEZ CHICARRO 1957.  
<sup>9</sup> FERNANDEZ GÓMEZ/LASSO DE LA VEGA/ALONSO 1987:193; SALINERO-SÁNCHEZ 2020b.  
<sup>10</sup> SALINERO-SÁNCHEZ 2020b.

<sup>11</sup> RIPOLL 1998; SALINERO-SÁNCHEZ 2019.  
<sup>12</sup> SERRANO/ATIENZA/LUQUE 1985; GUTIÉRREZ 1990,319.  
<sup>13</sup> GUTIÉRREZ 1990, 319.  
<sup>14</sup> AURRECOECHEA 1999, 179-180; 2007; KAZANSKI 1994, 177; SALINERO-SÁNCHEZ 2021.  
<sup>15</sup> PALOL 1955, 288; RIPOLL 1988, 105.

In the necropolis of Las Delicias (Granada), they found a rectangular example with three rivets and the buckle was articulated with glass paste cell decoration and, it would be related to type B of the Byzantine collection of Orsi<sup>16</sup>. The archaeologists who worked in this Granada necropolis associated this piece with a mercenary who was in a garrison in Zafarraya or as a product of the current trade<sup>17</sup>. The second hypothesis is more feasible, since trade is something totally expanded in the region.

### 1.3 Belt plates

There are not many studies on this type of clothing on the Iberian Peninsula, nor are there many finds in the chronology under study. In the south of the Iberian Peninsula, examples have been found in the following necropolises: Las Delicias, Marugán, Brácana, El Castellón, Villanueva de Mesía in the province of Granada, Villanueva del Rosario II and La Calera in the province of Málaga and in the province of Almería in Sierra Alhamilla (Fig 4).



**Fig. 4.** Examples of the belt plates. ZEISS 1934; PINAR GIL 2012, PEDREGOSA 2017; SALINERO-SÁNCHEZ 2021; TORO/RAMOS 1987; RAMOS/TORO/PÉREZ 1987; RIPOLL 1998

This type of plaque is usually made of gold, silver, bronze or copper. There are different types, for example, some are cruciform in shape, such as those from Villanueva del Rosario II, although most are rectangular with incised decoration. The function of this type of plaque was decorative as a belt accessory.

The chronology of the metal plaques, as we have been able to verify, has an initial dating established in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, due to comparison<sup>18</sup>. Some of those referred to have been found in tombs associated with a later chronology. For example, in the necropolis of Villanueva del Rosario II,

these plaques were found together with a buckle of a hebijon with a squariform base<sup>19</sup>, and therefore the dating would be between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. Other necropolises analysed present a chronology that ranges between the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century and the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D., as in the case of Las Delicias, and the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century and the 6<sup>th</sup> century in La Calera.

### 2.4 Rings

In relation to this type of object, we find typological diversity. Some are more elaborate, and even have Christian inscriptions, such as the one from the necropolis of La (s) Venta (s), (Jaén), whose transcription is as follows: T (---) v (ivas) in (Chr) isto or in Plataforma de Peñarrubia, whose reading could be CUM X VIVAS, and like the previous one, its chronology would be from the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. From the same set we have another ring with a quadrangular plaque inscribed with a series of dots around it and has a central decoration engraved in the form of a cross with four circles in each space. There are some isolated examples with the same decorative motif but having a circular plate instead of a quadrangular one; two examples would be the following: one in the site of Marugán in Granada, and another in Portugal in the necropolis of Silveirona (Estremoz)<sup>20</sup>.

Others have provided chronologies such as tomb No. 30 of Eras de Peñarrubia, with Roman characteristics in the Italic-Republican style associated with a chronology between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC–1<sup>st</sup> century BC<sup>21</sup>.

As has already been referred to in other cases, it is common for some of the pieces to last through generations, therefore it could be an indicator that this individual came from a Roman tradition since his ancestors.

The next ring is significant due to its chronology, which is quite broad. This ring has a central decoration in the manner of intertwined scrolls and joined to the rest of the ring by a series of “turns” on each side. There are several parallels found in funerary contexts in the Iberian Peninsula; by chronological order of discovery, we can mention the province of Granada, in the necropolis of Marugán (Granada), in the

Community of Madrid, Cacerá de las Ranas, and even in France, where they propose a chronology of I BC-IV AD<sup>22</sup>.

## 3. REFLECTIONS

After analysing the objects found in different necropolises, what can we say? In the first place, we can observe diversity in both types of objects, but at the same time some typologies are from specific areas.

<sup>16</sup> RAMOS/TORO/PÉREZ 1987.

<sup>17</sup> RAMOS/TORO/PÉREZ 1987.

<sup>18</sup> PINAR 2012.

<sup>19</sup> GUTIERREZ 1992; PINAR GIL 2012.

<sup>20</sup> REINHART 1947; WOLFRAM2011; SALINERO-SÁNCHEZ 2017, 250.

<sup>21</sup> SERRANO/ALIJO 1989, 114.

<sup>22</sup> REINHART 1947, 176; ARDANAZ 2000; SALINERO-SÁNCHEZ 2017; SALINERO-SÁNCHEZ *in press*.

Are we facing an identity reality in that specific area? The answer is yes. No reference has been made here to a spatial analysis of the necropolises, but we do not have isolated groups, rather they are spaces with a significant number of graves, reaching up to 100 registered graves in some specific case. They are not places located in far away, that is, the roads and communication routes are not far.

Although politically this region became part of the Visigothic Kingdom of Toledo at the end of the 6th century, the identity reality of these groups goes beyond these chronologies, i.e. here we have presented a chronotypological study of a set of materials found in funerary contexts. As has already been mentioned in some specific cases, their typology marks various moments and chronologies. We have some grave goods that could have been passed down through several generations, or their use continued. We must bear in mind that we are dealing with rural communities.

On the other hand, others mark the peak of the use of the funerary space (6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD), and therefore their production would be framed at this time.

We also have necropolises that would have begun to be used in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, extending to other times. This means that the use of the space dates back to ancient times, and that the group was already established in the area after several generations.

One problem we have encountered is that the places where they lived have not been found, and we have no anthropological studies either.

We are dealing with an identity, a rural population group that did not renounce the use of grave goods, but neither did it renounce trade, nor the cultural exchanges between the Iberian Peninsula, the Mediterranean and North Africa.

The appearance of a grave-goods with characteristics from another site should not ascribe the entirety of a site, but it is useful for the dating of a site.

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